



# The Only Christian Armenian Girl to Escape at Last from the Murdering Turks and Kurds and the Wicked Harems of the Sultan's Bloodthirsty Officials Reveals, for the First Time, Details of the Wholesale Massacres and Seizure of Thousands of Young Women, Which She Witnessed

ON these pages twelve weeks ago began the story of Aurora Mardiganian, the only Christian Armenian girl to escape the Turkish massacres of the Christians in Asia Minor, which began in her city, Tchamesh-Gedzak, near Harpout, 3 years ago on Easter Sunday.

Little Aurora's father and elder brother met their death at the hands of the Turks. Aurora, although only fourteen, was a well-developed and a very pretty girl. The Turkish governor had already marked her for his harem. He promised to spare her mother and brothers and sisters if she would join his harem slaves, but her devoted priest and her mother refused to let her make the sacrifice. The Pacha summoned all the Christian men and massacred them. The Turks carried off to their harems scores of the prettiest girls.

Then with the 4,000 Christian women and children of her city, Aurora was taken into the desert, where she was stolen by Musa Bey, the notorious Kurd Chieftain. Musa Bey sold her to Kehmal Effendi. She escaped by jumping into the Euphrates, and then began her wanderings over hundreds of miles of plain and desert, through mountains and valleys, now a captive of Kurds, now prisoner in a luxurious harem. She has told how she saw hundreds of thousands of her sisters beaten to death or carried away as slaves, and how, gradually, her people were wiped off the face of the earth.

To-day she tells of the death, before her eyes, of her mother, brothers and sister, of her experience in the house of Ahmed Bey, and of the shepherd of Tchamesh-Gedzak who came to her rescue. Next week Aurora will tell of her escape and how she finally reached the United States. Miss Mardiganian is telling her story on these pages with the consent of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, which is sending millions of dollars to the relief of the suffering Christians whom Aurora left behind.



A shepherd of Tchamesh-Gedzak. It was a shepherd from her own city who finally rescued Aurora.

No other shepherds than ours, or at least one who had come from Tchamesh-Gedzak, would know that call, I was certain. And all shepherds in Armenia are Armenians. Ahmed's sheep were tired and nervous. The unknown shepherd remained among them, every now and then repeating that same call, softer and softer. I went close to the window, lifted my face toward the iron-barred window and repeated the call. Even the sheep seemed to sense something unusual. They were suddenly quiet. Again I whistled, this time with more courage. Instantly the shepherd answered—I could almost detect his note of wonder.

I had learned that by leaping as high as I could I could catch the window bars with my hands and lift myself until my face reached above the window sill. Often I had caught glimpses of the yard in this way. But I was not strong enough to hold myself up more than a few seconds at a time.

Now I tried this, hoping to catch a glimpse of the shepherd in the moonlight. As I pulled myself up, I whistled again. Many times I tried before I attracted his attention to the window. When I had succeeded and he understood that behind that window there was a captive who was trying to signal to him, he made me understand by repeating his call three times in quick succession directly under the window.

I dared not call out to him, and I think he understood this. I tore a great piece of cloth from the dress that had been given me. I rolled this into a ball and threw it out. He saw and answered with his call. I hoped he would understand the torn cloth as a symbol of my imprisonment—and my hope that he would save me. I could hardly believe that even an Armenian shepherd would be left alive, yet it seemed to be so.

In the morning when the sheep were taken out the shepherd whistled under my window and I knew that he was signalling me. I answered as softly as I could. All that day a new hope gave me courage. I was sure deliverance was at hand, though I could not explain why.

I did not even attempt to sleep that night. The sheep came in early and the shepherd whistled his call. An hour later I heard it again—the shepherd still was in the yard. It must have been near midnight when I heard a rattling at the window bars. I looked, and there, framed in the moonlight, was a face I knew—the face of old Vartabed, who had been my father's shepherd when I was a little girl! God had sent him to me and had made me to hear and understand that familiar whistled call!

Vartabed called: "Who is here who comes from the Mamuret-el Aziz?"

"It is Aurora, the daughter of Giragos, of the Mardiganians of Tchamesh-Gedzak. You are Vartabed. Do you not remember me, who used to steal your lambs from the flock and feed them candies?"

Vartabed remembered. I told him all that I could, quickly. How I had come to be a captive of Ahmed and why I was in the dungeon. Tears came into Vartabed's ancient eyes when I told him how all my people were dead. I asked him how it was that he had been saved. "Old Vartabed is not worth the slaughter," he said. "I am of much value, since the sheep of Ahmed will behave only for me. Ahmed has forgotten that I am an Armenian, since I bend my knees for every prayer to Allah and thus prolong my days. But God understands that I am a Christian still."

He promised to help me to escape the dungeon. How he would bring it about he could not tell. "God will find a way," he said to me, and when he dropped back among his sheep in the courtyard I knew that God loved me and would, somehow, open the dungeon door.

To be Concluded Next Sunday.

others lifted me off the ground—I could not walk—and carried me to the house and back to the room with the divan. For two days and nights no one came near me but the slave girls. All that time I cried; I could not keep the tears from coming. That was when my eyes gave way; that is why I cannot see very well now without glasses.

On the third day Nazim, accompanied by his father, Ahmed, came to my room. Ahmed spoke with the same cruel gentleness. "What is past is gone, little one; it is time your thoughts should turn to the future. Nazim desires you. You are honored. He has punished you for your stubbornness, and he would forgive you and take you to his heart. That is as it must be. Your people are gone. There is none to give you mistaken counsel. You will now accept the favor of Allah and enter into a state of true righteousness."

"I want to die—kill me! I will never listen to your son nor to your Allah."

I had known sooner or later Ahmed or Nazim would come to me. That was the way in their house. My answer was ready.

They took me into another wing of the house, to a dungeon room, with just one iron-barred window looking out into the courtyard. There was no divan or cushions, just the floor and the walls. The window was high in the wall. I could not look out at anything but the sky—that same sky which covered so much of tragedy in my ravished Armenia.

Day after day, night after night, went by. Each day the alaiks, or slave girls, came and brought me bread, berries and milk. And each day the hodja, the teacher-priest, came to ask me if I were ready to accept the creed. But each day God took me closer into His heart, for I kept up my courage by talking to Him.

And then one night, after so many days had past I had lost count of them, God reached in through my dungeon window.

I was awakened by a commotion in the courtyard. where, on other nights, it had been very quiet. Soon I understood what was happening—sheep were being driven in through the gate. Ahmed's flock was being brought in from the hill pastures, driven in, perhaps, by military conditions.

I heard the yard gates swing shut. Then, above the bleating of the excited, restless sheep, I heard the shepherd whistle his call to quiet them. I jumped to my feet, my heart throbbing. Breathlessly I listened for the shepherd to repeat the call. Then I was sure—it was the same peculiar call, sharp and shrill, which my father always taught his own shepherds, the call which he had been taught by his own father when, as a little boy, he learned the ways of his father's sheep on the great pastures of Mamuret-ul Aziz. When I was very young our shepherds used to laugh at me when I would try to imitate them. I had been a very happy little girl when one day I succeeded so well that suddenly the sheep in our flock turned away from their grass and ran toward me.

Miss Mardiganian, whose revelations on these pages have been the first detailed and accurate description of the atrocities practised upon her people by the Turks, has consented to have her experiences reproduced in motion pictures to further the work of the American Committee for Syrian and Armenian Relief of New York City, of which Mr. Cleveland Dodge is treasurer.

This committee already has sent millions of dollars to the aid of the Armenian survivors. The film version of Miss Mardiganian's story, under the title "Ravished Armenia," will be presented in connection with a nation-wide campaign which, with the permission of the State Department, will begin January 12.

This historic attempt at the annihilation of a worthy Christian people already is being impressively filmed and, like several of the Red Cross and French and English official motion pictures, will carry the truth to the whole of Christendom.



Ahmed Bey (centre), one of his sons (at the left of Ahmed), and men of his household. In the distance is the house in which Aurora was Ahmed's captive. The son shown in the picture is the one Ahmed wanted Aurora to marry. Photograph found in the archives of Moush after the Russian occupation.

down on Sarah's head so that the blow flung her little body far out of the path. She did not move again. I think the blow must have crushed in my little sister's head.

Mother saw—and so did Hovan and Mardiros. Mother fell to the ground, motionless. A Zaptieth lifted her and struck her with his whip.

I fell onto my knees before the chief of the Zaptieths. "Spare my mother—spare my brothers!" I cried to him. "I will do anything you wish—I will belong to Allah—I will thank him only—if you will spare them!"

"It shall be as Nazim Bey desires," the Zaptieth said. I did not understand—I clung to him and prayed to him and to God at once. I tried to touch my mother, but the Zaptieth kicked me to the ground. Then, suddenly, I knew why they waited. Nazim Bey had come out of the house and had come up to us. When I saw him I crept to his feet and begged him for mercy. "I will be Turkish—I will pray to Allah—I will obey—just to save my mother," I cried to him.

"That is well—but you shall not only be a Moslem but you also shall be the daughter of a Moslem—that will be better still!"—said Nazim. "What does the old woman say?"

A Zaptieth jerked mother to her feet again. He lifted his whip. "The creed—quick!" he said to her. "Mother, please—God will forgive you—father is in

heaven and he will understand!" I cried to mother.

Mother was too weak to speak aloud, but her lips moved in a whisper: "God of St. Gregory, Thy will be done!"

The Zaptieth's heavy whip descended. Mother sank to the ground. I tried to reach her, but the Zaptieths held me. Again and again the whip fell. Mardiros screamed and tried to save her with his weak little hands. Another Zaptieth caught him by the arm and killed him with a single blow from his whip handle. When they flung him aside Mardiros's body fell almost at my feet.

Hovan wrapped his arms around the Zaptieth who was beating my mother, but his strength was too feeble. The Zaptieth did not even notice him until my mother's body relaxed and I knew she was dead. Then he drew his knife and plunged it into little Hovan.

It was only a little while—two minutes, perhaps, or three, that I stood there, held by the Zaptieth. But in those short minutes all that belonged to me in this world was swept away—my mother, Mardiros and Hovan, and Sarah. Their bodies were at my feet. Both mother and Hovan died with their eyes turned to me, looking into mine! My eyes see them now, every day and every night—every hour, almost—when I look out into the new world about me. I must keep them closed for hours at a time to try to keep the vision shut out.

I heard Nazim Bey give an order to his father's Zaptieths. Some of them picked up the bodies of my dear ones and carried them away, I do not know where. The

the notorious in, brother-in-law, to whom for 85 cents, to his friend, is a present.